St. CATHERINE'S HERMITAGE near BATH,

St. CATHERINE'S HERMITAGE near BATH,

A

SKETCH

OF

St. CATHERINE's HERMITAGE,

NEAR BATH;

IN A

LETTER

TO

SIR JOHN O'CARROLL, Bart.

AT BRUSSELS.

BATH, PRINTED BY R. CRUTTWELL;
AND SOLD BY W. MEYLER IN THE GROVE.

M DCC LXXXVII.

St. CATHERINE'S HERMITAGE near BATH,

1609/4483.

MUNICIPAL LIBRARIES
SOLD
BY ORDER
OF
COMMITTEE
BATH

BRITISH MUSEUM
30 DEC 72

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE contiguity of St. Catherine's Hermitage to ſo populous and fluctuating a City as Bath, invites many, who for want of health, or of ſomething elſe to do, ſo frequently to aſk admittance to ſee a ſpot calculated only for retirement, *that the Proprietor is under the neceſſity of refuſing in future all who are not his friends or particular acquaintance; except ſuch who may think it (and they are aſſured it is not) worth their while to purchaſe, either of his Bookſeller, or his Gardener, the following Deſcription of it.*

*** *In ſome fine days during the ſummer, a ſucceſſion of Ladies and Gentlemen have hindered the gardener from doing three hours work in the whole day.*

TO

SIR JOHN O'CARROLL, BART.

AT BRUSSELS.

YOU aſk me, dear ſir, to ſend you *a deſcription of my delightful Hermitage*; and though your reſidence in another kingdom, and my deſire to oblige you, urge me to attempt it, yet I muſt apprize you, that it is impoſſible to comply with your requeſt.

Deſcriptive writing is, of all others, even with an able pen, the moſt difficult; and though I might ſucceed a little in the deſcription of *Montſerrat*, (an object ſo novel and ſo ſingular) yet I feel myſelf utterly incapable to deſcribe ſuch a ſpot as this—a ſpot ſo fortunately placed, ſo irregularly marked, and a little improved by my own hands. For when all is ſaid that can be ſaid, the beſt deſcription would convey but a very imperfect idea of the place deſcribed.

Suppoſe, for inſtance, I had never ſeen your beautiful daughter, and you were to write me a particular deſcription of her perſon, features, &c. I could only conclude, that ſhe is a very charming and beautiful woman; but yet I could not know her when we met, by that deſcription. If, then, the features of a human face or perſon cannot be deſcribed, how can the aſpect of hills, dales, wood-lands, incloſures, rivers, buildings, &c. be otherwiſe delineated, than with an able pencil, inſtead of a pen? and therefore I can only ſay, that the ſituation is inferior to few ſpots any where, that the *tout enſemble* renders it in my eyes a little *bijou*, and obſerve that moſt ſtrangers are pleaſed with it.

It commands a ſouth-weſt proſpect, and hangs on the ſide of Lanſdown hills, and ſo cloſe under a high tump to the north, that we are perfectly ſheltered from the ſevere winds of that quarter, and in a great meaſure from the eaſt winds alſo; for though it is a quarter of an hour's ſteep walk from the weſt end of the Royal Creſcent in Bath, and commands juſt ſo much proſpect that the eye can take in the verdure, and no more, yet Lord THURLOW was pleaſed, in *pleaſantry*, to name it *Gully-Hall*.

From my little ſtudy window, however, I look down upon BATH with that indifference, which age, and a long knowledge of its contents, or rather diſcontents, have furniſhed me with; and with infinite pleaſure on a mile and a half of the gentle AVON gliding down the vale, and, now and then, ſeeing the ſwelling boſoms of deep-laden barks freighted with merchandize; which I conſider as returning meſſengers,

meſſengers, whom I have ſent forth to fetch me tea from Aſia, ſugar from America, wine from France, and fruit from Portugal.

But to return to *Gally-Hall*; for when great rains fall on the mountains which ſo ſhelter us from the northern winds, yet they do not hinder a very rapid ſtream which ſometimes tumbles down with mighty force indeed; but by being kindly attended to, and invited to take a few turns between a variety of little *breaſt-works*, with which the buxom valley is adorned, I rather conſider it an ornament than a defect; though none of the *boſoms* on the banks are barren, and ſome yield a conſtant ſtream of the pureſt water, in or near Bath.

No little ſpot of ground can be more beautifully irregular, broken, and divided, than this dingle; and no wonder; for it is as GOD formed it, and as He willed the ſtately trees to grow, which ſhade it, and who cauſes the whole ſurface annually to be covered with the primroſe, violet, and all the elder ſiſters of the ſpring. I have therefore taken a few ſteps about it, but with caution, to avoid diſturbing ſuch adorable marks of the Founder of all things, viſible and inviſible; and my eyes are as often turned upwards as downwards, with delight and gratitude, that ſuch a walk, narrow and humble as it is, and limited as I am, is to be my laſt ſcene on this ſide the grave.

The inſolence of a fellow who poſſeſſes more land than manners or honeſty, once drove me out of this ſequeſtered ſhade, and I ſold it to my youngeſt ſon; the houſe I then

left

left upon it (if a houſe it could be called) he was pleaſed to *improve*, and now its front reſembles Alderman Pudding's houſe, over-againſt the Pack-Horſe on Turnham-Green; and therefore the incloſed drawing is ſketched from a point, in which only a bit of the houſe is ſeen, peeping through the trees. You will ſee, however, the hermit's hut, built on the ſide of the dingle, at which we chiefly reſide in the ſummer.

So much for a little art and nature:—but I muſt inform you, that from the great quantity of broken urns which were turned up, wherever we opened the ground, on a little lawn which overhangs the dingle, I was led to ſuſpect this to be the ſpot where the ROMANS buried their dead, when they inhabited BATH; and upon *deeper* enquiries, I found my conjecture eſtabliſhed beyond a doubt. But unfortunately the SAXONS, or ſome ſucceeding race, made the ſame uſe of it, ſo that I have never met with a perfect urn, but thouſands of their fragments, and many of the convex ſtones which covered the tops of the urns to prevent the incumbent mould from mixing with the aſhes of the dead.

Three ſtone coffins have been dug up, two Saxon, and one Roman; the latter had the body in it, quite perfect, and ſome of the fleſh on the ſkull. It had been covered with a pickle, which preſerved it.

Faſt fixed (and never more to *move*) on the ſide of my hermit's hut, is ſecured the body of my old *Wandering Shaiſe*; and on an old decayed oak, which grows through the roof of the kitchen, the following lines are engraven on the rind, as a *memento* to MAN:——

" Stranger,

" Stranger, kneel here, to age due homage pay!
When firſt ELIZA held *Britannia*'s ſway
My growth began:—the ſame illuſtrious morn,
Joy to the hour, was gallant SYDNEY born.
SYDNEY, the darling of *Arcadia*'s ſwains,
SYDNEY, the terror of the martial plains.
He periſh'd early; I juſt ſtaid behind
An hundred years, and lo! my clefted rind,
My wither'd boughs, foretell deſtruction nigh.
We all are mortal:—Oaks and Heroes die."

Near a rude arch, on all ſides embraced with the twiſted eglantine, is a perforated rock-ſtone, from which conſtantly runs a ſmall ſtream of the pureſt water imaginable, that falls into a Saxon coffin dug up hard by; from the length and narrowneſs of which, I have diſpoſed myſelf to believe the body which I found in it to be that of a beautiful Saxon virgin; ſo that inſtead of being hurt with the idea of its original uſe, it is become only a memento of what we muſt all come to. And who knows but " ſome kindred ſpirit" may, a thouſand years hence, make the ſame uſe of my departed daughter's coffin; which, alas! lies hard by, and in cloſe contact with the old Roman knight's mentioned above, which is to receive what remains of myſelf?

Now do not wonder! for I muſt inform you, that ſome years ſince I had ſcooped out a cave on the ſide of the dingle, under the ſpreading roots of an aſh tree, and turned a rude arch in front of it; and there placed, cut in relief, the head

of that wonderful genius THOMAS CHATTERTON, with the following lines beneath it:——

" Sacred to the Memory of
THOMAS CHATTERTON.
Unfortunate Boy!
Short and Evil were thy Days,
But the Vigour of thy Genius ſhall immortalize Thee.
Unfortunate Boy!
Poorly waſt Thou accommodated,
During thy ſhort Sojourning among us.
Thou livedſt unnoticed,
But thy Fame ſhall never die."

Since which, the long, painful, and hopeleſs illneſs of my daughter, which had worn her down to death, and her parents to ſuch a deep ſorrow, that the idea of the proceſſion of removing her remains down the hill ſeemed to us but one remove leſs painful than that fatal remove between LIFE and DEATH; and therefore, as ſhe was virtuous, dutiful, and not void of ſome genius, we have depoſited her body beneath the only monumental ſtone raiſed in *Britain* to the greateſt Genius *Britain*, or perhaps any other nation under the ſun, has produced: apologizing, however, for ſo bold a ſtep, by the following beautiful lines from POPE, and fulfilling, in ſome meaſure, the offerings propoſed:——

" What tho' no ſacred earth afford thee room,
" Nor hallow'd dirge be mutter'd o'er thy tomb;

" Yet

" Yet ſhall thy grave with riſing flow'rs be dreſt,
" And the green turf lie lightly on thy breaſt.

" Here ſhall the morn her earlieſt tears beſtow,
" Here the firſt roſes of the year ſhall blow;
" While angels with their ſilver wings o'erſhade
" The ground now ſacred by thy reliques made."

Since which, ſome (unknown) admirer of my daughter publiſhed in one of the Morning Papers, the following lines, which he modeſtly terms 'Elegiac Lines' offered to her memory. They were too flattering to be neglected, and therefore on the model of the LYONS *Taurobolium*, which guards the unhallowed ſpot, they likewiſe are impreſſed, and are as follows:——

" READER, if Youth ſhould ſparkle in thine eye,
" If on thy cheek the flow'r of Beauty blows,
" Here ſhed a tear, and heave the penſive ſigh,
" Where Beauty, Youth, and Innocence, repoſe.

" Doth Wit adorn thy mind, doth Science pour
" Its ripen'd bounties on thy vernal year?
" Behold, where death has cropt the plenteous ſtore!
" And heave the ſigh, and ſhed the penſive tear.

" Does Muſick's dulcet notes dwell on thy tongue,
" And do thy fingers ſweep the ſounding lyre?
" Behold, where low ſhe lies! who ſweetly ſung
" The melting ſtrains a Cherub might inſpire.

Of

" Of Youth, of Beauty, then, be vain no more,
" Of Muſick's power, of Wit, and Learning's prize,
" For while you read, theſe charms may all be o'er,
" And aſk to ſhare the grave where ANNA lies."

I cannot, however, quit this melancholy ſubject, without mentioning an accidental object, which, on a ſuperſtitious mind, might operate very forcibly. The workmen, in turning this rude arch, put up the ſtones unhewn, in the moſt irregular manner; yet it ſo happened, that two whitiſh ſtones, ſomething of a baſtard alabaſter kind, were ſo laid, that *ſince* my daughter's death, and the place becoming more an object of ſerious attention, I perceived that thoſe ſtones, at a certain oblique point of view, offer a very ſtriking figure of a winged angel, and conſequently are now emblematical of the lines, which almoſt touch the " ſilver wings" of this natural piece of ſculpture.

It is a pleaſing idea, and no unnatural one, I hope, (however it may ſavour of Popery) to ſuppoſe that there are an hoſt of ſaints and angels offering up their prayers to GOD in behalf of departed ſpirits. Surely then the inhabitants of an hermitage may ſo far join in the prayers or faith of the Catholick Church, that however divided we are *here*, as to particular points of faith, that by their interceſſion we may all meet hereafter: for, alas! I fear there is little probability of you and I meeting here.

I am, dear ſir,

&c. &c,

P. S. Dr. YOUNG, author of the NIGHT THOUGHTS, being introduced where I was on a viſit in London, he attracted the attention of all the company, and in a particular manner that of an elderly lady, who was ſo aſtoniſhed to find him a cheerful lively old man, inſtead of the gloomy being ſhe had conceived him to be, that ſhe could not help expreſſing to him her agreeable ſurpriſe. "O Madam," (replied the Doctor) "there is much difference between "*writing* and *talking*:"——

So, that you may not conclude me altogether loſt in ſorrow and ſadneſs, I muſt give you the epitaph of one of my fellow-travellers. He was a very honeſt fellow, as the following lines will teſtify:——

True to his maſter, gen'rous, brave,
His friend, companion, not his ſlave;
Fond without fawning, ſtill the ſame,
When fortune ſmil'd, or when the dame
Led the poor Wanderer ſuch a dance,
An exile ſad, thro' Spain and France.

Bluſh then, ye human ſons of b-----s,
Who fawn on raſcals for their riches,
Yet grudge the tribute of a tear
To the poor dog which ſlumbers here.

Mrs. THICKNESSE, who preſents her compliments to you and your's, calls out "*Pray put me in*, for I am afraid I

ſhall die ſoon." So I repeated to her the following Epigram:——

My ſickly ſpouſe, with many a ſigh,
Oft tells me "PHILLY, I ſhall die."
I griev'd; but recollecting ſtrait,
'Twere bootleſs to contend with fate;—
So reſignation to Heaven's will
Prepar'd me for ſucceeding ill.
'Twas well it did;—for on my life,
'Twas Heaven's will to *ſpare my wife.*

You will conclude, my dear ſir, that a ſpot which is ſo reſpectable for *modern* as well as *ancient endowments*, and which is to be farther enriched with *kindred aſhes*, will not be left liable to the precarious diſpoſal of an auctioneer's wooden hammer:—No, ſir; if no child of *our*'s ſurvive us to enjoy it, it ſhall devolve to a moſt reſpectable GENTLEMAN of BATH, or to his heirs; a Gentleman, with whom I never ate or drank, and for reaſons he, or they, will *then* know; but which I will carry to the grave with me.

The following lines, which are in a little receſs at the foot-path gate, are too applicable to be omitted, though they may be rather out of place:——

Here

Here let Time's creeping winter ſhed
His hoary ſnow around my head;
And while I feel, by ſlow degrees,
My ſluggard blood wax chill and freeze,
Let thought unveil to my fix'd eye
The ſcenes of deep Eternity;
Till life diſſolving at the view,
I wake! and find thoſe viſions true.

St. Catherine's Hermitage,
Feb. 1ſt, 1786.

MUNICIPAL LIBRARIES
SOLD
BY ORDER
OF
COMMITTEE
BATH

BRITISH MUSEUM
30 DEC 72